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Creating "Auschwitzes Of The Heart"

You may recall that back in May 2012, a Baptist preacher in North Carolina named Charles Worley shocked and dismayed many people across this nation when he told his parishioners during a sermon that gay people should be put in large areas enclosed by electrified fences -- *and left to die.*

"Build a great big large fence 50 or 100 miles long," Worley ranted. "Put all the lesbians in there. Fly over and drop some food. Do the same thing with the queers and the homosexuals. Have that fence electrified so they can't get out. You know what, in a few years, they'll die out. You know why? They can't reproduce."

A *YouTube* video of his sermon went viral and was viewed more than 150,000 times in a matter of days. Worley proudly defended his hateful rhetoric -- saying it was in response to President Barack Obama's announcement earlier that week in support of gay marriage.

Today, nearly six years later, Worley still preaches at the Providence Road Baptist Church in Maiden, N.C., and his hateful rhetoric is still being listened to and condoned by people who still consider themselves good Christians.

I reached out to Worley by email on his church's website late last year and again more recently, asking if he had any remorse for "creating an Auschwitz of the heart" with his hateful remarks. So far, he hasn't replied.

Sadly, such venomous hate talk has gained wider acceptance in the interim. While its foul stench used to emanate primarily from small-town Americans like Worley who feared people different from themselves, it now comes from the mouths of the President of the United States and other national leaders in Washington, D.C, as well as from legislators in state capitols across our nation -- who unashamedly and openly discuss discriminating, jailing and shipping off all those whom they deem undesirable.

Trump, of course, is primarily responsible for raising hate talk to its unprecedented current level via his fiery "pep-rally" speeches to his "base" and his bilious Twitter account -- both of which continually drum the need to build a wall to keep out 'murders' and 'rapists' from Mexico; the need to arrest, detain and deport millions of illegal immigrants (even those who've been here for decades), and the need to keep Muslims and other supposed "terrorists" out of the country. His rants are repeated and embraced by supporters in the mass media and general public to such an extent now that they seem to have become -- to use the current tag -- the "new normal." Safe to say that the revulsion this sort of hate talk used to cause is waning.

The result: Hate is gaining a stronger foothold in the American consciousness and is translating into policy. To wit:

U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained 30,000 to 40,000 "aliens" daily in 2017. For fiscal 2018, the agency has requested financial support to detain as many as 44,000 daily.

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A Mississippi law permitting blanket discrimination against LGBT individuals went on the books in June 2017 after a state court lifted an injunction holding it off.

In August, Trump pardoned former Arizona county sheriff Joe Arpaio, who was found guilty of violating federal laws pertaining to the illegal profiling, detaining and jailing of Latinos in his county. (Instead of going to jail, Arpaio now plans to run for the U.S. Senate.)

In October, Georgia Republican State Representative Betty Price, the wife of Trump's former Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, proposed a state law that would allow the quarantine of HIV-positive people. Fortunately, Georgia's legislature hasn't acted on her proposal.

Trump's own "Religious Freedom Day" proclamation in January decreed: "No American – whether a nun, nurse, baker, or business owner – should be forced to choose between the tenets of faith or adherence to the law." Translation: any U.S. citizen should be able to discriminate against gays (or anybody else) if he/she feels that person or persons compromises his/her religious beliefs. In other words, an individual's religious beliefs trump the law – even the Constitution. No pun intended.

Just as the Nazis in 1930s Germany used discrimination and hate talk and as a strategy to publicly dehumanize Jews, communists, homosexuals and any others who didn't fit into the Third Reich's scheme (calling them "untermenschen," or subhuman), the alt. right in America today seems to be following the same, ugly path. It's not just targeting the LBGT community, undocumented aliens, HIV-positive individuals, Mexicans and Muslims –it's targeting anybody that doesn't support the Trump Administration's "America First" agenda.

In view of our past national transgressions -- including but not limited to the government-sanctioned genocide of millions of Native Americans, slavery of the 18th and 19th centuries and the Jim Crow laws and public lynchings of the 20th century, World War II internment of Japanese-Americans, and McCarthyism and the Red Scare -- how have we allowed this hateful, bigoted venom to again plume in our mainstream?

Haven't we learned from our checkered history? Do we want "Auschwitzes of the heart" to actually materialize in America?